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## Hanover Park man's Chevy truck a 1954 classic



For 42 years, Don Zierdon commanded a great view of Chicago roads from his perch high above in his eighteen-wheeler.

Crisscrossing the area hauling freight presented him with a full spectrum of available project vehicles tucked away far off the beaten path. But when it came time for him to select a classic to restore, nothing could sway him from what he knew best.

"Being a trucker all my life, trucks were — and still are — my passion. Instead of using one for work, I wanted one for play," the Hanover Park resident said.

Naturally it was from the cab of his Peterbilt where he first spied his 1954 Chevrolet 3100 pickup, resting quietly between two oak trees in West Chicago. The one-owner workhorse had been bought new from Carlson Chevrolet in Glen Ellen for \$1,650. Belonging to a sign painter, it had faithfully served year round duty, braving the elements, until being put out to pasture after the engine died and a desire to upgrade emerged.

"The wood in the bed floor had rotted away and the bodywork was in shambles," Zierdon said of his initial impressions. "If you looked underneath the fenders you could see straight through the firewall into the cab. It was rough, but I figured it was worth saving."

A sale ensued on that summer day in '79, at which point Zierdon hauled the dilapidated heap back to his home garage to begin the disassemble process. Everything was stripped off to reveal the frame, which received a **hefty dose of sandblasting** and a thick coat of Rustoleum primer and topcoat. A valiant attempt was made to salvage the rust-eaten cab but, being too far gone, a non-corroded unit was procured from Arkansas — one free from the effect of heavy snow, salt and ice.

Unfortunately, the bitterly long Midwest winters also claimed the bedsides, turning the once solid steel into rickety Swiss metalwork, suitable only for scrap. Replacements were found in Texas and added to the growing collection of parts.

Now with a sound starting point, the former trucker set about his vision of returning the Chevy back to assembly line glory. The stock 235-cubic inch power-plant was left under hood but rebuilt with new pistons and rods. The interior received a fresh headliner as well as seat upholstery after Zierdon discovered original material stuffed behind the nondescript cover, applied at some point long after the truck left the dealer.



“It's an upholsterer's trick to help bolster the cushion after years of use and misforming. I sent small swatches all over the country trying to find a pattern match.”

Several rolls of the '54 fabric were squirreled away in California allowing Zierdon to recover the bench with exactly what you would have found in the cabin when it was on the showroom floor. Transport Blue paint was applied to the exterior, complemented by an ivory for the top — perfectly complementing the wide, whitewall tires.

While the truck was specifically ordered from the dealer without any frills, Zierdon chose to accessorize with not one or two, but all 25 of the available options that year. These include such things as an outside sunvisor, spotlight, foglights, emergency tool kit, wheel covers, tissue dispenser, hood ornament and windshield washer wiper.

The project was completed in 2000 and since then Zierdon has taken every opportunity to get this petite hauler onto an open stretch of highway, typically rolling with the Summer Knights car club.

“You'll find me out seven days a week: Monday through Friday are cruise nights and Saturday and Sunday are the shows,” Zierdon said. It was at one of these outings where he was approached by a bystander who shared a very special connection with the pickup. Don recalls the encounter:

“A young man and his son asked where I bought the vehicle. When I told him, he exclaimed to the boy, ‘This could be grandpa's truck!’ It became clear it was when he told me his of his father's sign-painting profession, immediately linking him as the seller.”

Several weeks later Zierdon and his restored classic made a special trip over to its former home, showing the original owner how far his old work truck had come.

“The experience was nothing short of amazing. He came out with tears in his eyes and simply could not believe it was the same pickup he had owned all those years ago. That afternoon alone made all the time, patience and money that went into the project worthwhile.”

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